

The Borough, Brockham, Surrey.

By Alex Street



This little story, I shall call ‘Once upon a Time’. While it is not a very original title, it is purely a trip down memory lane for me, and a very nostalgic one. I shall be remembering neighbours, family, and old friends, all of whom are long gone, with the exception of one or two who moved away many years since. Indeed, only one contemporary of mine remains who was born here at the same time as myself, and is still living in the house in which he first saw the light of day!

The Borough is still a pleasant little lane in spite of having been built upon to capacity. There are now sixty dwellings in its quarter of a mile length, but at the time I am speaking of, more than seventy years ago, there were only thirteen houses, and seldom did anything move along the lane faster than a horse-drawn vehicle or a pedal-cycle. One could wish that some of the present day motoring residents would read, mark and inwardly digest the safety factor suggested here!

The ditch along the wayside in those days would be bright with wild flowers, especially when the brilliant, shiny, yellow celandines were so prominent as the heralds of Spring, followed by the pale, pink milkmaids, leading us into summer. Further along the lane would bloom a rarer wild flower, St. Johns Wort, (*Hypericum Perforatum*)!

I remember this posh name with its genus and species from school days, when I used this flower as a particular specimen for a project, and was awarded a good mark for my efforts! Later in the year the hedgerow would be aglow with the warm, pink blossom of the brambles, and in autumn, fruitful with an abundance of blackberries and the poisonous red

berries of the cuckoo flower and bryony, a perfect habitat for the quiet creatures of the countryside.

Twice a day, after milking, cows were herded over the bridge from Elm Grove Farm to the river meadow, where they would enjoy the peaceful grazing amongst the lush grasses and sedges in the spring. Later in the year, the grass would be allowed to grow until it was long enough to be cut for hay in June. The horses, pulling hay reapers, would then appear from the farm, followed in due time by the turning machines that would toss the hay until it was warm and thoroughly dried by the summer sunshine, ready to be raked into haycocks.

It could then be collected by the hay wains, carted back to the farm and loaded on to the elevator, which carried it to the top of the hayricks.

The elevator would be driven, usually by a pony harnessed to a pole, and this creature would plod around in a circle for hours on end to keep the mechanism going, until the day's work was done, when the creature could return to its stable for a well-earned feed and rest.

The smell of the new-mown hay would be delightful of course, and this would be an invitation for the children to romp and play such games in the hay, much to the farmer's annoyance. Our greatest delight was to take our tea into the hayfield, usually a jam sandwich and a little medicine bottle of lemonade. Sometimes this was made from the real fruit, but more often a concoction made from either lemon flavoured sherbet, or, some awful lime-green granules called "Eiffel Tower Lemonade Crystals". When brewed and cooled, this looked rather like the fluid in a spirit level, and swirled about in the bottle like oil in a puddle of water, but in spite of its revolting appearance, the flavour was good and we loved it!



The river Mole in full flood, with the Borough beyond and clothes lines full of laundry. c.1900

As soon as the hay was saved, the cattle could then return to their meadow until heavy rains arrived in the autumn and winter, when the river would flood over the fields, sometimes to a considerable depth, and the entrance to the Borough would be blocked for days, the road level then being considerably lower than it is today. When the floods subsided, a number of stretches of water would be left behind in the meadow, and the children would pray for hard frost to arrive so that these would freeze, and we could have the most wonderful slides on the ice, wearing the soles of our boots through with shrieks of delight of course, and probably getting a thorough thrashing for doing so when we eventually arrived home from school!



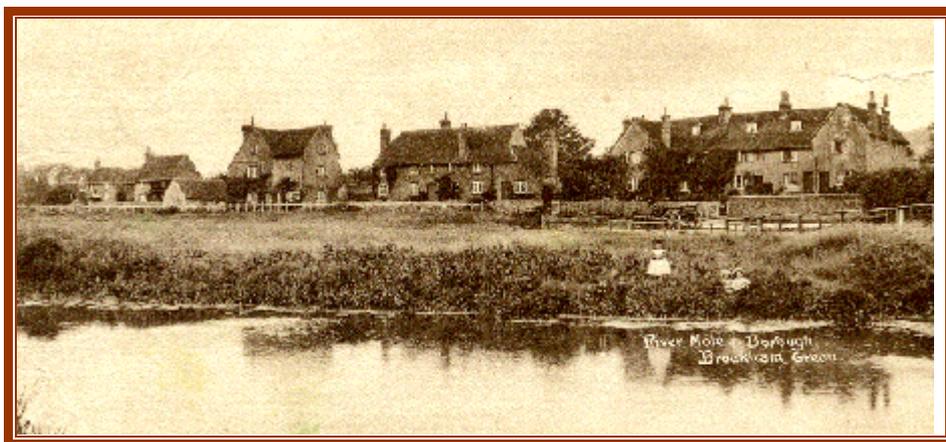
In those days, the Borough, turning in from the bridge, had on the left hand side, a broad area of open land where cattle-drovers in the past could take their animals down to the river to drink, and the local laundresses could hang out their washing to dry. This piece of common land stretched from the bridge to a hedgerow that ran in a line from the end of the ditch to the huge ash tree right on the river bank.

Curiously, the hedge disappeared long ago, and this piece of land has sadly diminished by degrees through the removal of old fences and the replacements being put in different alignments to the previous ones. So it has gradually become amalgamated with the river meadow, and today there is nowhere for cattle to have access to drinking water, because what little space is left, has been taken up by the new footbridge!

No doubt this was a fording place at one time, for the river has always been very shallow at this spot and there doesn't appear to be any record of a structure crossing the water before 1737 when Richard and Thomas Skilton built the present bridge.

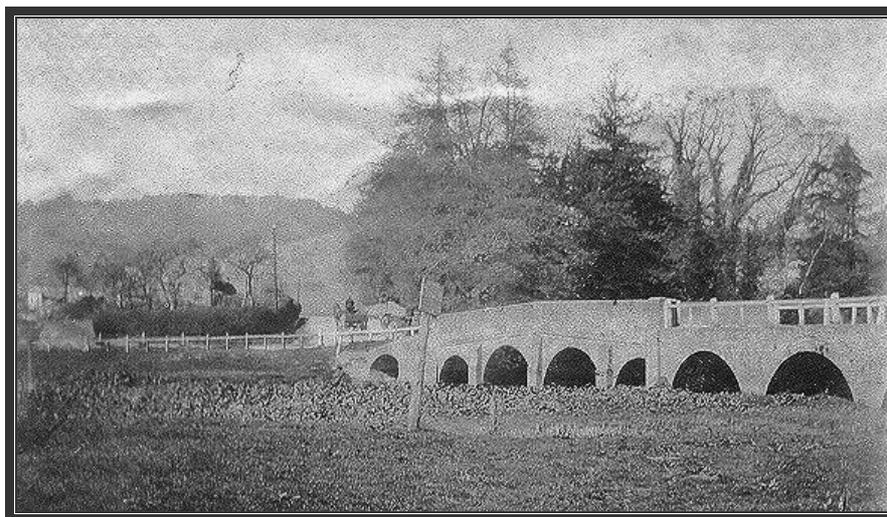
The word "Borough" has several meanings and is described in part, in some dictionaries, as "the approach to a castle or fortification". One wonders if at some time in

the past the Borough did, in fact, lead to Betchworth Castle, which is just a few hundred yards further on from the end of this lane. A bridge would have been necessary to negotiate the river, for the castle ruins stand on the opposite bank, but if a bridge ever existed then it has long since collapsed and disappeared, or, has been swept away by successive floods over a great many years, for no evidence of any such access remains today. As I have stated elsewhere, I was born and lived as a little child in the house which is now number 33. In those days it was the 13th house and the last in the lane, around the corner in isolation from the other twelve, which were on the right hand side of the Borough and all facing the river.



The twelve cottages facing the river with the Sharp children down by the water. c.1905

The first block of five houses were a curious mixture of dwellings, the middle three being very old and probably dating back to the 17th century and were, at one time, a brewery and malt-house owned by a certain Mr. Nightingale. It is said he produced ale for an inn called The Horseshoes, further along the lane (now Nos 18 & 20.) and another inn just up from the bridge in Brockham Lane, called The Odd Man Out, now known as Moleside Croft.



A horse & cart is passing Moleside Croft (The Odd Man Out!)

The first and fifth houses were added at a much later date, probably in the 19th century as, perhaps, dwellings for the brewers, and are of quite different structure and design from the other three.

Seventy or more years ago there lived in the first house, a family by the name of Chitty. Mrs Daisy Chitty was a daughter of the Thorpe family who had lived there for some years earlier. Mrs Charlotte Thorpe, the widow of William, was one of the many laundresses in the Borough, whose wash-house would be full of steam and soap-suds every day. Elbow grease would have been applied in boiling, scrubbing, wringing and mangling laundry, from break of day until darkness fell, and her washing line a display of snowy-white linen for many days of the week, before the inevitable ironing process began.

A number of laundry maids worked at this establishment at one time, and presumably some of them “lived in”. The photograph below is of a group of ladies who carried out this service for the gentry of the village, with Mrs Thorpe portrayed, clearly, as the ruler of the roost!



Back row, 2nd & 3rd from the left – Alice Capon & Daisy Thorpe
Front row, 2nd & 4th from the left – Mrs Charlotte Thorpe & Mrs Finch
About c.1900

Ernest Chitty, a skilled carpenter, married Daisy Thorpe, and a considerable family came along in due time, with Ethel, Ena, John, Rose, Ernest (junior), George and Alec.

In the second house lived Thomas Street, a bricklayer, and his wife. They also had a family of Ronald, Doris. Winifred, Harry and Rose.

The third house was inhabited by a Mrs Emma Sharp, a lady whom I remember with a wonderful head of wavy, white hair. She was the widow of Alfred Sharp, a cabinet maker.

They raised a family of Harry, Walter, Rose and Ellen. Ellen had by now become Mrs. Dadson and with her son Allen, resided with Granny Sharp. Incidentally, Mrs. Emma Sharp was the daughter of Thomas Budd, the last family retainer to sleep in Betchworth

Castle where the Peters family had resided for many years. The Castle was sold to the 'Hope' family of Deepdene, Dorking, who, in 1834 proceeded to destroy and reduce it to a relic, in order to produce a fashionable "Romantic Ruin" within their estate! Such desecration and complete vandalism would not be permitted today, for, in former time, it must have been a very prominent and impressive structure on its ramparts high above the river Mole, to the north-west of the Borough.



Betchworth Castle (east front) By Samuel & Nathaniel Buck - 1737

The fourth house in the Borough was the home of Jacob Dudley and his wife Ellen. Jake was a coalman and their family consisted of Elsie, Joan, Cyril, Jean and Betty. Mr. Dudley became the village school caretaker in his later working life.

In the fifth house dwelt Harry Wicks whose mother, Letitia Wicks, had been the acclaimed "Granny Wicks", the village mid-wife. She was always on call to deliver a child or lay out and administer the Last Offices to the dead, at any hour of the day or night. She was a familiar figure, trudging through the country lanes with her little bag and her candle lantern at dead of night to tend to the sick, all this taking place long before there was a doctor in the village. Harry Wicks and his wife Amy, had three daughters, Amy junior, Elsie and Marcella, and it was Marcella who kept house for the old man later in life in his widowed status.

The next group of cottages was a row of three, all very old and again probably of the 17th century. John & Jane Monnery had lived in the first house, but by the time I'm speaking of, two spinster sisters were there, Lucy and Phyllis Cox, retiring ladies of independent means and they had really improved the cottage by modernising it with the installation of a bathroom etc., very up-to-date for those times.

In the middle cottage was Mrs. Clara Tidy, who kept a little black and white, terrier type, mongrel, "Tiny", which always looked almost as dirty and grubby as the old lady herself. Personal hygiene and the use of soap and water were not among her regular habits, but her

temper was keen and well known. If children from the road should happen to play outside her cottage, she would invariably come out onto the front steps, waving a stick and shouting in no uncertain terms for us to be off, (at least, I think that's what she said!) the dog yapping endlessly as if to endorse her threats. She scared us to bits! When she eventually died, a neighbour took on the job of clearing her house, and it was found to be alive with vermin, fleas and bugs everywhere. Everything was burned in the back garden, and the house thoroughly fumigated. It was then considerably altered before it was sold and occupied by another family.

The third cottage of the group, had been lived in by my maternal grandparents, George and Edith Henley, when they were newly wed in 1892, but they subsequently moved away to Gadbrook in about 1894 and, after several other occupants of the place, a Mr & Mrs Henry Pirt were now in residence, who also had a substantial family with Betty, Russell, Joyce, Donald, Colin, Stewart and Knole.

Mr. Pirt was a milkman and how the nine of them coped in that little cottage with only a living room and two small bedrooms will remain a mystery.

The next building was of three stories, and contained a pair of houses, now Nos. 18 & 20. It is said that at one time it had been an inn called "The Horseshoes", and subsequently became The Betchworth Parish Workhouse for the homeless and destitute, although at what stage in its history it served these purposes is not clear, but there is a record of a poor widow of the Borough, being destitute, was placed in the Workhouse, two doors away, in 1851! Later it was divided into four tiny cottages, but eventually evolved into two roomy houses where William & Louisa Capon, with their family, had lived in the first one since about 1880.

A daughter, Alice, had married Ernest Rapley and they continued to live there with their daughter Hilda and their son Norman, and he continues to live there to this day, 78 years later!



Norman & Hilda Rapley with the Writer at Worthing May 2000

Mr. Rapley was a man with a tremendous sense of humour, and would have us children in fits of laughter with outrageous and exaggerated tales of his early life in Dorking. One thing was certain, he was the only person I ever knew that had actually taken part in the notorious Shrovetide Football played in Dorking High Street, with a great risk, not only to life and limb, but also to the numerous shop-fronts. This riotous game was eventually brought to a halt by legislation many years earlier, but the stories he would tell of chaos and mayhem that this annual event caused, would keep us amused for many hours. Mrs Capon and her daughter Alice were another pair of laundresses who took in washing, but how they managed will always be something of a miracle, for every drop of water had to be carried in buckets to the house, from the “Spring” down the lane outside what is now, No.14.



Ernest & Alice Rapley – c1950

(As far as I remember, houses Nos. 12 to 20 did not have water wells in their gardens, and all had to carry their water in buckets from the Spring, which had a picket fence around it with a latched gate and steps going down to the water level. This Spring still exists, but is covered over by a large grill today, although in rainy seasons the water can still be seen overflowing and running down the road to the river.)

There was also a lodger in this household by the name of Harry Matthews, unfortunately, he was deaf and dumb, but he was a gardener for the Anning family at >The Meadows on the village Green.

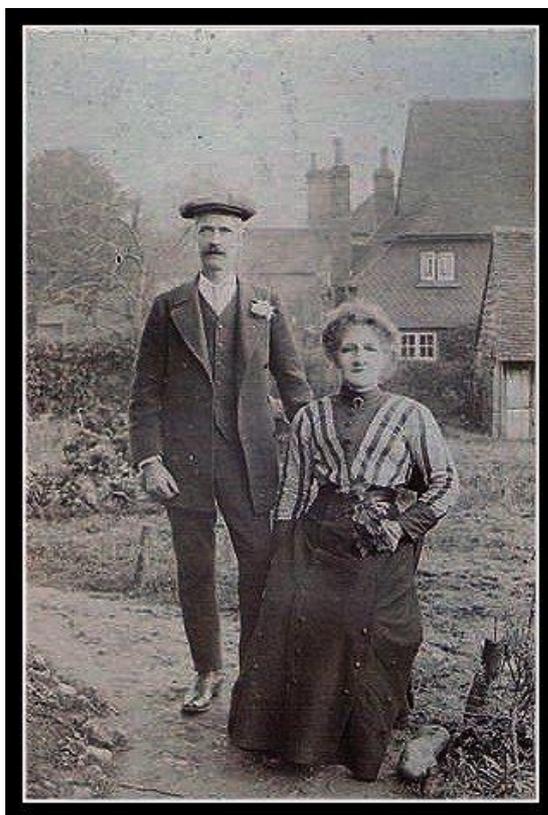
The second house of this pair was inhabited by Mr & Mrs James Mills, together with their son (who was always called Sonny, I never knew his proper name!) and their daughter Connie. Mrs Mills had a parrot in a cage that hung in the front room window, and in the

summer, when the window was open, the parrot would pick up all sorts of sounds from the lane, and repeat them at leisure. Thus, it would imitate Mrs Rapley from next door, when she was calling the children in to meals. It would also imitate old Alf Lucas, a great-uncle of mine who lived further along the lane. He was a chronic asthmatic, and would lean on a tethering post outside the Mills house, to get his breath and have a good cough, and so, the parrot would occasionally have a good cough too, with other thoroughly unpleasant accompaniments that went with this asthmatic condition! Like Queen Victoria, Mrs Mills was not amused! Old Jimmy Mills rode a three-wheeled tricycle, but, because he was such a slow-moving man, he earned himself the nick-name of Treacle and it stuck for the rest of his days!

There was, and still is, a considerable gap before the next cottage, and it is thought that probably another house may have stood there many years ago. If so, there is no evidence of it today or has been for a very long time.

The next cottage, No.24, is thought to be the oldest in the Borough, and certainly one of the oldest in the village. A 16th century Hall House with no chimney, and only a smoke bay to take the smoke from the central fire.

The smoke bay still exists and is a feature in the upstairs room, but since the house had long ago been divided into two floors, a new fireplace with its chimney, was added and built on the outside wall!



William & Sarah Homewood. c.1900

Here lived my great aunt and uncle, William and Sarah Homewood, and here was another mystery of accommodation, for at one time, their complete family of Adelaide, William, Albert, Maud, George, Winifred and Leonard, with widowed great-grandfather Edward Lucas and widowed great uncle Alfred Lucas, all lived together in this four-roomed cottage! I never knew what the sleeping arrangements were, but in my time, the house seemed to be full of sofas and settees!.....and by then, some had died, most had married, leaving only great aunt Sally, great uncle Alf, Win and Len still in residence. (High up, under the eaves at the front of this old house is carved the name - W. Cobb - and curiously, at a seance held at this house many years later, when a couple by the name of Howarth lived there, this name was repeatedly spelled out on the Ouija board! When the residents told me of this event, I suggested they get a ladder and look under the eaves, they were astonished!!!)

In the grounds of this old cottage, stood for many years, an ancient shed built of wooden scantlings, with a roof of Horsham Stone slabs. This shed was at one time the workshop where straw hats were made. These were used in particular by the Brockham cricket team in the 19th century, earning them the nick-name of The Brockham Strawyards! (This old workshop survived until the 1990s when, in a state of collapse and quite unsafe, it had to be demolished)

Somehow, with only a water-well in the back garden, which was shared by the next door neighbour, aunt Sally also took in an enormous amount of washing from the village, and I never remember seeing the only living room in the house, without garments of every description hanging from various lines that stretched across this room from one beam to another! Although the interior of the house was a nightmare, immediately outside the front door was the most beautiful old fashioned, pink rose, with a heady perfume that was beyond belief. As a little child I would bury my face into a bloom for the sheer joy of its cool fragrance, and if I concentrate and think hard, I can still recall the smell of that lovely rose today. There is a similar one still growing up the front wall of No.20, it might have been there for a hundred years!



Aunt Sally's Cottage, No.24. As it is today.

The little cottage on the corner, No.26 now known as “Three Bears Cottage”, was inhabited by James & Clara Balchin with their daughter Gladys. For some extraordinary reason, Jim had the nick-name of “Twiddler”, but I’ve no idea why! This little family had to share the water- well with the Homewood family next door, and like others in the lane, Mrs Balchin did copious amounts of laundry for the bigger houses in the village. This work was carried out in a corrugated iron shed just inside the hedge around the corner, and it would give us boys great delight to hurl stones on to the roof when old Mrs Balchin was quietly inside ironing! Her shrieks of terror caused us a lot of amusement, that is, until our parents got to hear of it, then there were the usual thrashings all round and we had learned another lesson for a while!

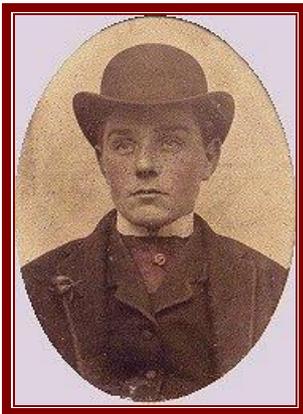
One can imagine that for all the laundry ladies in the Borough, it must have been very hard work indeed, drawing water from the wells and the spring, keeping the coppers boiling, flat-irons by the dozen heating around a special stove for the purpose, and working from dawn to dusk.

A hard life indeed, but their laundry did them great credit, for it was always sparkling white and all done without the aid of machines and modern soap powders of today.



River Mole and the Church from the Borough c. 1904

The thirteenth, and last house up around the corner, Hill View, isolated from the other twelve, now number 33, was known to be of the 17th century, and belonged to my Grandfather, George Henley. Because of his widowed status, his daughter, my mother, Edith Street, kept house for him, along with my father, Albert Street, and her unmarried brother, George Henley (junior), therefore, when I arrived on the scene on the 13th June 1924, there were five of us in all.



Grandfather - George Henley
1886



Mother – Edith Rebecca Street
1965



Alex Leslie Street
1942

This old house had been occupied by Richard Monnery and his wife Harriet with their family of Charlie, William and Mabel. Richard Monnery had been an estate carpenter for the Hope family of Deepdene, Dorking, and his workshop was still a feature of the house as, indeed, was the substantial wood storage shed. Harriet Monnery's initials and the date 1886 are still to be seen on the chimney breast, probably recording the date of the addition of this scullery and the upper room, to the house.



Hill View in Winter – c.1955

The house was a very roomy and substantial country cottage, once part of the Deepdene Estate, owned by the Hope family of The Hope Diamond fame, but the estate had been broken up and sold off in the early 1920's whereupon, my grandfather had purchased the house, and had moved from Gadbrook back to the Borough, early in 1924, after an absence of some thirty years.

In those days there were no modern facilities in country cottages, and in this case our water was drawn from a well by a huge hand pump over the stone sink in the scullery, where also stood the enormous copper for boiling the family washing.

The cauldron that hung on a chain over the open fire in the scullery was always full of broth, made from bones and oddments of meat, with an assortment of vegetables and herbs (and occasionally the odd lump of soot which has fallen from the chimney). Here, a log fire burned continually throughout the winter, and the thick, warming soup was always available, and welcome, during the bitterest of weather, when the men came in from work.

Cakes and general meals were cooked on the big kitchen range in the living room, which also heated that apartment where we spent most of our leisure time in the winter, a fire being lighted in the parlour, (the hallowed of hallows), only on a Sunday and at Christmastime.

There was also a carpenters shop attached to the back of the house under a sloping roof, with an entrance from the scullery, and an exit door going out into the back garden.

It was here that some joinery work was done for the Deepdene Estate in much earlier times, but this area was no longer used for carpentry purposes and now served as a very useful early utility room, where potatoes and other root crops were stored for the winter

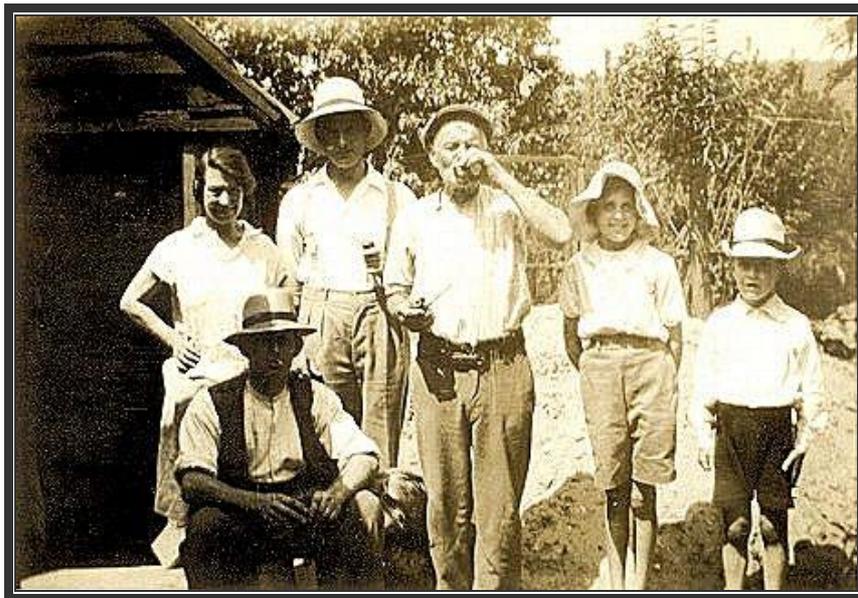
away from the frost, wet clothes could be hung to dry, and washing could be dried during inclement weather.

Paraffin containers and candles were also kept here, with extra lamps for the house, and lanterns for use in the garden when darkness fell, while bread was baked in the enormous faggot oven built within the chimney walls which backed on to the ingle nook of the sitting room. The garden was enormous, laid out with a huge vegetable area where enough crops were grown to keep us fully supplied and independent more or less throughout the year.

Flowers were not neglected either, for the borders were usually colourful from Springtime, right through the Summer, and in the Autumn the orchard would be fruitful with different varieties of plums, greengages, damsons, quinces, pears and many fine, old-fashioned dessert and cooking apples.

The outhouses ranged from the spacious wood house, where timber was once stored for use in the carpenters shop in former times. There was a substantial garden tool shed, a fuel house for coal and logs, a sty and pig pen, a hen roost where the fowls had free range of the orchard, and the old outside earth closet which was a common facility in those days, long before main drainage came to the village.

The final building, my grandfather's pride and joy, was his wine cellar where nine gallon, and four and half gallon barrels, with many stone jars and bottles, were stacked and usually kept full of delicious homemade wines, which he had brewed from all sorts of flowers, and from a variety of fruits and berries, and of course, root vegetable wines of every description. There were always the most wonderful smells emanating from this building, especially when the wines were in the process of fermenting, and I have to admit that I had my first taste of alcohol at a very early age from this establishment.



My Grandfather's Wine Cellar!
With Mary Henley, Ernest Fielder, George Henley, Marjorie Fielder & Me,
Albert Street sitting. c1932

This toddler, would apparently emerge from time to time, ever so slightly tiddly and quite unsteady on his legs, my Grandfather insisting that I should be brought up with a discerning palate, in spite of my Mothers protestations! Winding throughout the garden were a maze of footpaths, passing under yew arches and overshadowed by trees and shrubs, especially along by the old water well not far from the back door, and although it was all somewhat confusing, altogether it created a most interesting and attractive setting in its general lay out, and was all very agreeable.



Hill View as it is today - 2007

I will not enlarge any further on the details of this old house, for they are given in another story relating to a strange event which occurred there, one dark winters night in 1927, and also of a weird experience by another couple, who owned the place many years later, giving the house the reputation of being haunted!

One of the features in days gone by was to walk down the Borough on a warm summers evening, and find most of the old ladies sitting out with a chair on the front door step taking in the evening air, after the days work. Seated in their long dark dresses with perhaps a Jet cameo at the neck. One, in particular, would wear her little black Victorian bonnet with a knot of violets at the front, and each lady with a pure white, starched apron protecting their Sunday-best and all looking absolutely immaculate.

Another feature of those days was the fact that as the girls of the families became old enough, they had to help their mothers with all the household duties in cleaning, cooking, washing and ironing and thus they learned a little housewifery. Husbandry was taught to the boys by helping their fathers with the gardening, wood sawing and chopping for the fires etc.

No child was allowed out to play until their weekly duties were completed. I haven't

witnessed any of this for many years, and it's not surprising that so many young people start out in married life in complete ignorance of their household duties for the benefit of each other!

Because the womenfolk were always working to supplement the family income in those days, there was little chance to go to Dorking for the weekly shopping except on a Saturday afternoon, when a Mr. James from Oakdene road would run a charabanc from the village.

This quaint vehicle waited on Penfold lane in front of the Royal Oak, on the village Green. There was no set starting time, and the bus would leave when there were enough passengers aboard to make it profitable at tuppence a trip. If the bus was full to capacity, it wouldn't be able to climb the then, steep slope at the top of Brockham Lane, therefore, all the men would have to alight and push, while the vehicle wheezed and gasped its way up to the Dorking/Reigate road.

By this time the engine would be over-heated, and it was necessary to wait a while for the machine to cool down and get its second wind, then it would set off along, what is now, the old road to Boxhill Farm, down over Boxhill bridge, (*which was swept away in the great floods of 15th September 1968*) continuing up around the corner of Betchworth Park, along past the Castle Mill, Pixham Lane and so into Dorking. (*The Dorking/Reigate road and the Deepdene bridge as we know it today, were not completed until about 1930*).

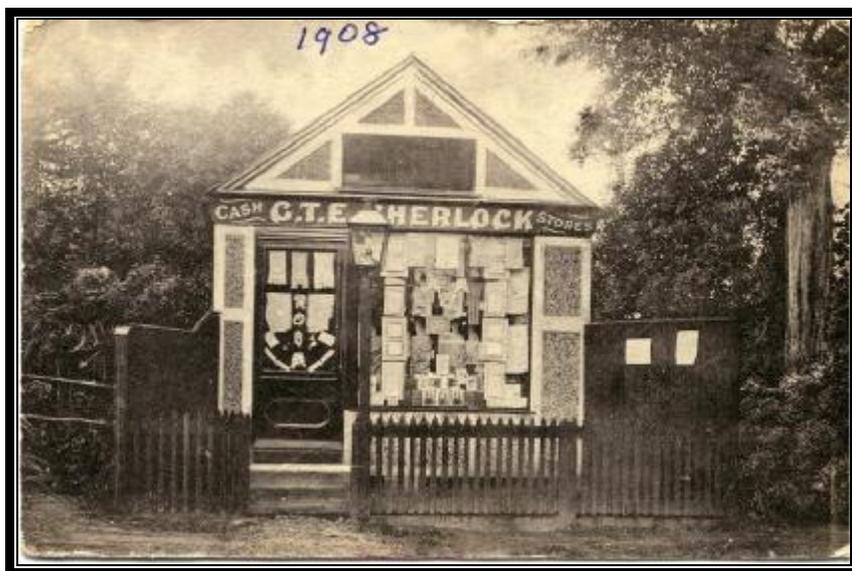


Boxhill Bridge swept away in great flood of 1908. Rebuilt and swept away again in great flood of 15th September 1968

A lot of people would go to town on the evening bus, in order to buy cheap meat. Before the days of refrigeration, butchers would endeavour to sell out for the weekend, before the shops closed at nine or ten o'clock at night. Anybody missing the last bus to Brockham had to walk the whole distance through Betchworth Park back to the village, not a pleasant journey when loaded down with a weeks shopping, and probably hindered by dense fog or deep snow in the winter!

Anybody wishing to go to the town during the week either walked or perhaps were lucky enough to get a lift in a horse and cart with a local farmer, who, especially on a Monday, might be taking a few piglets or some hens to the weekly market, and one could share the journey with the live-stock!

In those days we had four shops in the village, Sherlocks Stores (*where Century Cottage now stands*), a shop that sold everything from a penny oxo cube, to a suit of clothes made by a “Bespoke Tailor”!



Sherlock' Stores. c.1908

In Stents, the bakery, (*now Surrey House*) one could purchase anything from fancy confectionery to paraffin oil. Hardware could be obtained from this establishment, also fireworks for Guy Fawkes Night. Another Stents shop, which was also the Post Office, became the Spar shop of today, but unfortunately the postal element was removed from this business and now villagers have the inconvenience of travelling to Strood Green for their postal requirements and pensions. Mr. Balchin, the butcher, had his shop by the pond in Middle Street. This is now Chittys and still a butchers shop.

It would be a familiar, and accepted sight in those days to see housewives going to the village stores in their aprons and pinafores, but the snobbery of today would frown and criticise such attire, for one must keep up appearances at all costs!

Apart from the local shops, there were a number of tradesmen who would call at the door on a regular basis. A Mr. Dann from Reigate, would carry on his bicycle, a huge case full of packaged teas, while another elderly man, who had a whispery, muffled voice and whose name I have forgotten, brought to the door a selection of cottons, threads, darning wools, buttons, needles, pins, buckles, elastic, ribbons, knitting needles and wool.

Fishy Frank would arrive on a Friday morning with a variety of fresh fish, his van dripping with melting ice blocks, while Frank Rapley would supply us every week with

candles and matches together with paraffin oil for our lamps and heaters.

Fresh milk from Elm Grove farm was brought to the door twice a day by Harry Colwell who drove a horse and cart, carrying in and out to all the houses an enormous heavy canister, which had two measures hanging inside, one for half a pint, the other for a full pint, or two of these for a quart, straight into the household jug! It couldn't have been fresher!

Roger Turp, from Betchworth came along regularly on a Saturday afternoon with his van filled with fruit, and so we were able to occasionally have bananas, tangerines, oranges and lemons but these, of course, were a luxury and usually only bought for high-days and holidays as special treats! Every household kept chickens so that fresh eggs were usually available, and at our house, we kept a gaggle of geese for breeding and fattening for Christmas.

There were a number of other tradespeople who would deliver goods to the door, the errand boy with his special bicycle with a huge basket of goods on the front, and during the summer months, the Walls ice-cream man would come round occasionally on his tricycle, with the special ice box painted in a dark blue and white chequer pattern and the once familiar, slogan Stop Me and buy One, emblazoned on the front. This man would have a selection of ice creams on board ranging from penny Sno-Fruits and tuppenny Vanilla Bricks with more expensive varieties that were well out of the range of our pocket money.

We were lucky if we could have a penny Sno-Fruit, this was a triangular tube of frozen highly coloured water with strong artificial flavouring which didn't resemble any particular fruit, but my personal favourite was the green one, this was known as the lime flavour! One great snag with these was, if our grubby little hands melted the ice a little too much, it would slip out of the tube into the dust and grit on the ground and we would have such a job cleaning it sufficiently before we could eat any more!

Then I remember a Mr. Walker who came from the Dorking International Stores on a Friday evening for orders. We were always his last call for the day and after the business had been dealt with, home-made wine was served and the adults would settle down to learn what news and gossip he could impart. I remember so well the catalogue he would leave for the Christmas fare, full of wonderful illustrations of decorated Christmas cakes, mince pies, Christmas puddings, bottles of wines, boxes of Christmas crackers, party novelties such as snowmen that exploded, scattering silly little gifts around the room! Boxes of chocolates with the most seasonable pictures on the lids, great jars of sweets, tins of fancy biscuits, jars of candied fruits and preserved ginger. Such a variety of goodies that my mouth would water as I ticked off the items that I secretly hoped we might have! Of course, most of our Christmas fare would be home-made and usually my parents would order just the annual bottle of Stones ginger wine, a box of Christmas crackers and perhaps a bottle of Port (if funds would allow such luxuries!) How very different from today!..... But I digress.....

To the south and the west of our old house were garden allotments rented out to local inhabitants who only had small gardens, but large families to feed. This land was sold off during the thirties and initially became a garden nursery run by a Mr. Brown who lived in a two-roomed hut on the site. The project was not a success, and shortly it was sold again and became a building project, which soon spoiled the locality with many new houses.

The Borough continued along past my grandfather's house, and terminated with a five-barred gate in line with the end of his orchard, which was on the left-hand side of the lane. On the right-hand side of the gate stood a little clump of elm saplings, offspring of a parent tree that had presumably stood close by, and had been cut down many years before my time. A curious little story is attached to this spot. It was said that, standing amongst this group of trees, a tall, gaunt figure dressed in a tricorne hat and a long black cloak, would be seen from time to time, staring across the meadows! This apparently occurred always at dusk and especially when the mists were rising from the river along by the castle. Who this apparition could have been or for what purpose it waited so patiently at this spot, was never established. In subsequent years, when the Borough had been extended and many more houses had been built, there was a Mrs Crouther living at No.58, who declared that on two occasions she had seen this figure standing motionless among these trees, but as she approached, it gradually faded and disappeared leaving her frightened to death and chilled to the bone!

Now it so happens that my father built a bungalow at this very spot, late in 1927, with the clump of trees in the corner of the plot, and, although I have continued to live here ever since and passed these trees on some hundreds of occasions at all hours of the day and night, I have never had the doubtful pleasure of encountering this strange phenomenon. Furthermore, in all probability, it has long since fled to pastures new, for some fifty years ago I cut down the entire group of elms before they became too big and a danger to the property, so perhaps I destroyed the haunt of this dark vision forever, and I hope he will accept my belated apologies!

These saplings however, did have their uses. Having grown to some 30feet tall they were wonderfully easy for a boy to climb, and in the days before the wireless became an accepted feature, it wouldn't be easy to discover the correct time if the house clock should stop, so, my parents would send me out to climb the tallest tree, from where, I could clearly see the church clock between houses Nos 16 & 18 down the Borough. I could then call to them the correct time, and the clocks would be adjusted. Mark though, at other times I would be constantly told how dangerous it is was to climb trees!!

Brockham church clock was driven mechanically in those days and always chimed the quarters and the hours and rarely ever failed, but since it became electrified the clock is seldom going today and totally unreliable, such a shame for it is quite a feature of our village Green. Incidentally, when my bungalow was built there were still no modern services available. We had to use oil lamps and candles for illumination, and we pumped water from the well up into a large storage tank in the attic for domestic use. Eventually, electricity came to the village and was installed into this property in the winter of 1932. I

well remember running home from school to be in time to switch on for our first evening with electric light, what a miracle, no less. It wasn't until 1948 that we had mains water in the house, and again, it was a joy not to have to pump it up from the well. Although, it has to be said, mains water will never taste so sweet or as cold and fresh as the well water on a hot summers day. The well still exists of course, but what the condition of the water is today is quite unknown by me, but it is dug on the course of an underground stream (my father must have found it with divining rods!), so one assumes it is still pure and sweet.

Sometime in 1928, two brothers arrived with an old bus and took up residence in the field opposite our bungalow. Turning the bus into living quarters and with the aid of an additional shed, they made themselves reasonably comfortable and prepared to settle down in this primitive accommodation. They were George and Jim Sticker Collins. What they did for a living I've no idea, but they kept themselves pretty much to themselves, and the only time my parents saw them was when they would come to the door asking for a bucket of drinking water from our well, for other purposes they carried water up across the field from the river! They were never any trouble but within a couple of years or so, the local Health Authority moved them into the Workhouse in Dorking where, as far as I remember, they remained for the rest of their lives. Their shed in the field was dismantled and sold while the bus was burned and the resulting debris carted away. George Collins kept in touch with the village for several years and became something of a celebrity by roasting the two-tailed pig on the Green for the annual bonfire celebrations. He would start the day in a thoroughly sober condition, by lunch time he would be very merry indeed with the drinks provided by well-wishers!! Come evening, he would be incapably drunk. He was in this condition when some prankster threw a lighted firework into the pan of hot fat beneath the pig. The firework exploded of course, smothering poor old George in scalding fat burning his hands and face quite severely. He had to be taken to hospital for treatment and regrettably, that was the last time George Collins roasted the pig for Brockham bonfire!



George Collins roasting the two-tailed pig at Brockham Bonfire. c.1934

But back to the Borough.....

Cottages Nos, 24 & 26 were sold during the sale of the Deepdene estate in 1921, and after some ten years or so, the new owner was able to turn out the old tenants who were only paying minimal rents. He then disposed of the back gardens to a building speculator, altered and modernised both the old cottages and sold them to people within a much higher income bracket, and thus began the great changes to the Borough which have continued ever since!

During the late twenties/early thirties, The Borough was extended and where Nos 47 & 49 now stands, a cowshed and hay-barn were constructed to house the local farmers cattle.

The extended road also allowed access to a gravel pit, which farmer Richard Chart of Elm Grove Farm, had opened up as an additional enterprise to his farming. But although many tons of ballast was extracted by Bill (Daddle) Boxall, the quality was considered to be very poor and scarcely worth the digging, so the project never succeeded, was abandoned, and the pit allowed to become flooded.

As the water was shallow and pure spring water into the bargain, it became a great attraction for the local children to play and paddle in, much safer than the river of course. One further benefit came from the pit; somebody planted watercress in this pure spring water and it flourished to the extent that we were able to glean the cress every Sunday during the season, and watercress sandwiches were always a feature at the Sunday tea table, so fresh and delicious!

Eventually the land around the pit was built upon and some of the houses have sunken gardens, and, as a result, they also have flooded gardens when the water table rises in rainy seasons!

Just before World War II, more bungalows were built towards the far end of the Borough, and during the twenty or so years following the war, every remaining speck of land has been filled with a dwelling of some sort.

When the main drainage came to the village in about 1930, this made a great difference to the Borough. Part of the river meadow was fenced off on a line from the far end of the Borough down to the river, and the land onwards to the Pudden Hole Copse was developed to form a sewage works. Huge tanks were dug into the ground, and all the excess soil was used to partially fill the part of the gravel pit that extended out to Brockham Lane; the soil being carted in skips behind a miniature railway engine, along lines that ran beside our property. This was driven by a Mr. Killick, who would occasionally give me a ride on the engine, such excitement!

A night-watchman, by the name of Harry Mott, who had a peg leg and rode a tricycle, would guard the potentially dangerous main drainage trenches through the hours of

darkness, and many red hurricane lamps would be hung on poles along the edge of the excavations by the roadside. He would sit in a little wooden hut for shelter against the elements, a coke brazier burning fiercely, on which he would brew his tea and toast his sandwiches during the night.

He would allow us children to roast potatoes on a toasting fork around this fire which naturally tasted so much better than anything that mother produced at home, even though, in many instances, we consumed the spuds more raw than cooked!! but we had tough stomachs! Apparently, at one time Mr. Mott had lived at Bosham in West Sussex, and I clearly remember him telling us of the legend of the ancient city of Bosham sinking into the sea through some unknown cause, and at an unknown period in the past. No trace of its former existence evidently remained, other than at times of storms and exceedingly rough seas, the cathedral bells could still be heard tolling in the towers far beneath the waves!!!!..... How we would stand agape, either with wonder at this extraordinary story, or from perhaps, the effect of the hot potato on our tongues!



Approaching the bridge & the Borough. c. 1900

As a result of this drainage work, filtering beds and a whole system of outfall units were developed, eventually allowing all the wastes to run into the river, supposedly in a thoroughly purified condition. This entire project was most unpopular with the local residents and was, from time to time, the source of a great deal of unpleasantness for many years, until it was finally closed down and dismantled in about 1982, much to the great delight of all those living near by.

In one way, the Borough benefited from this development in that, the hitherto cart track was made into a reasonable road. Many lorry loads of rubble of every description was heavily rolled into the surface and covered with tar macadam, and because it was frequently used by the local Council in servicing the Outfall Works, the road surface was maintained to some degree for about 50 years.

When the Outfall Works was finally closed down, the road maintenance ceased also

and, with the heavy usage of modern-day traffic, the surface quickly broke up and with successive winter conditions the road was soon reduced to a disgraceful and dangerous condition, far worse than it had ever been in the old days when it was no more than a cart track. Eventually, in 1999, a committee was formed and most of the residents agreed to contribute , £250 per household, towards having the road properly surfaced. Now it is a great joy to use without risk to life or limb, although, one still has to observe caution because of the speed of some of the motorists who refuse to recognise the fact that this is still no more than a farm lane!

What is the future of the Borough?.....

So many changes have taken place since the end of World War II. Many more houses have been built in this little lane and it is difficult to imagine where any more could be placed. But I don't doubt that others will be squeezed in somewhere in spite of Green Belt rules, regulations and restrictions. Existing properties have mostly been altered and extended, in common with the practise of recent years. Bungalows stretched to capacity, some developed into two-storey buildings, but thankfully most of the 13 original old houses remain more or less the same in their outward appearance, although all have been modernised little or much, and made so much more convenient.



The Borough from the attic window of No.18. Autumn 2000

But what of the population?

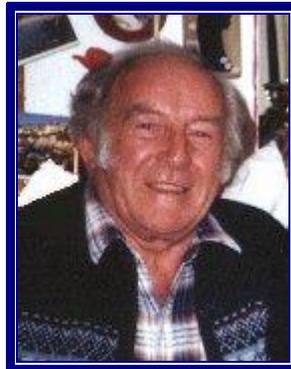
That could be a very delicate question! The numbers have naturally increased, but the attitude and atmosphere has changed beyond belief. Seventy years ago all the inhabitants of the original 13 houses were on totally friendly and neighbourly terms, successive generations having known each other for many years and many having gone to school together in the village. Many were related of course, all were labouring and working class families, and some were very skilled craftsmen. The men would drink homemade wine together and discuss their gardens, crops, work, local government, village life and politics in general, while the womenfolk would share a pot of tea with neighbours and discuss their laundry, their cooking and baking, their knitting and needlecraft, their children, their flower

gardens and any latest village news of particular interest.

Everybody's business was everybody's business, not in any nosey, interfering or snobbish way, but in a manner of genuine concern and care. Incomes were very low indeed and few had little or nothing to spare, but if a neighbour should be in a desperate situation for some particular reason, help would always be forthcoming, and the sharing and caring phrase would be genuine, well meant and practised. But today, we scarcely know our immediate neighbours, and know the names of very few in the Borough. Fragments of cordiality still remain and some individuals will pass the time of day, but little or no socialising seems to take place at all. The television and entire families being out to work, or perhaps I should say business, has tended to make us remote from one-another and I suspect that assumed social-standing has rendered some to remain aloof from the rest, and it is all so very different and quite sad. It is a sign of the times, no doubt, and the younger generations, I suppose, are quite happy to go along with the current trends, never having known the old country traditions and way of life.

But now, at this time of revision, October 2007, I am the only true native "Badger", born and bred in the Borough, and still living in the bungalow to which I was brought as a little child in 1927. And as I sit and reflect over the many changes I have seen during my 83 years, I am so thankful that I lived in very different and more sociable times, and have the most wonderful memories of how the Borough used to be,

Once upon a time



Alex Street – October 2001
Revised in October 2007